

# Idaho

## Current Developments

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November 2003

### Message from the State Conservationist

The 61st IASCD annual conference was a big success. I had the opportunity to talk to several district supervisors about their conservation resource needs and received feedback on field office workload.

Conservation district leaders considered four resolutions during this year's meeting. All of them pertained to the Conservation Partnership. Local Work Groups and having decisions made at the local level were repeated several times during the conference.

I plan to have several issues addressed through Local Work Groups for this year's Farm Bill activities. I will be sending a letter to all conservation district chairs with 10 to 15 items for them to discuss with these local groups. As an agency, we need this kind of leadership at the local level.

The State Office Staff joins me in wishing you and your families a bountiful and happy Thanksgiving Holiday.

/s/ Richard Sims

RICHARD W. SIMS  
State Conservationist

### SNOTEL site will help protect watershed

**“Another weapon has been added to the city's arsenal in the ongoing battle to mitigate the damage at Myrtle Creek.”**

This was the first sentence of an article in the Oct. 30 edition of the *Bonniers Ferry Herald* Newspaper about the new SNOTEL site installed in northern Idaho's Boundary County.

On Sept. 2 a forest fire started in Myrtle Creek watershed located about six miles west of Bonners Ferry. It burned about 4,000 acres in the steep basin that provides the municipal water supply source for Bonners Ferry.

Within a month after the first phone call came into NRCS asking for help, a SNOTEL site had been installed to report hourly weather data that will give city officials time to react if erosion occurs that could impact water quality in the stream and allow them to close the intakes for the drinking water supply.

The National Weather Service will use the real-time weather information to better determine significant rainfall events or predict rapid snowmelt runoff associated with a rain-on-snow event.

An interagency team met on Sept. 22 while the fire was still burning to discuss the type of weather station needed—a National Weather Service (NWS) weather station, Forest Service RAWS (Remote Automated Weather Station), NRCS SNOTEL site, or existing automated weather stations in the area.

A SNOTEL site was selected as the best choice because of its capability to collect data throughout the year, monitor snow water content, precipitation, temperature and snow depth to help determine when the snow is ripe and ready to melt. Rapid runoff events in this area are often a result of mid-elevation snow and or rain during the winter and spring.

A potential SNOTEL site location was selected on a south-facing slope at a mid-elevation of 3,520 feet in the burned area. The NWS and Forest Service were also interested in collecting wind speed and humidity. Other sensors installed to make the site an enhanced SNOTEL site or SCAN site included barometric pressure, solar radiation, wind direction, and soil moisture/temperature at depths of 2, 4, 8 and 20 inches deep.

Ron Abramovich, water supply specialist, made a second reconnaissance trip to the city on Oct. 8 to verify the site location and attend the public meeting concerning potential watershed problems.

The site was installed Oct. 21-22 off an existing road that the Forest Service will probably close for public access as requested by the Fish and Wildlife Service because the road is in potential grizzly bear habitat area. Negotiations are underway to allow NRCS vehicle access to maintain the site.

A host of agencies contributed support and services in installing the site before snowfall weathered us out. Governor Kempthorne's proclamation declaring Myrtle Creek watershed a disaster area made it easier to get help and assistance needed to install the site in a short time frame.

The \$22,000 needed to purchase the equipment to install the site came from the Forest Service report request for an automated weather station and Idaho Homeland Security (Bureau of Disasters).

Other agencies providing support and assistance to acquire the necessary permits, paper work, equipment and personnel came from the Forest Service, NWS, the mayor and city of Bonners Ferry, State of Idaho, and Boundary County. A local logger donated his time and equipment to help level the snow pillow pad, which allowed the crew to install the site in less than two days.



Personnel from several agencies plus local citizens helped install the new SNOTEL site in less than two days.



The completed site. Photos by Ron Abramovich, water supply specialist.

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## **IASCD holds annual conference**

The Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts held its 61st annual conference Nov. 9-12 in Boise. The meeting theme, "Discovering the Corps of Conservation," commemorated the Corps of Discovery lead by Lewis and Clark from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean.

Dr. Peter Nowak, research professor at the University of Wisconsin, presented the keynote address. As reported in the Nov. 14 issue of *Capital Press*, Nowak said soil conservation districts should end their self-imposed hypocrisy and focus on those who need help the most, even when it isn't wanted.

Nowak said every district has two lists of the producers living in its territory. Board members and employees concentrate on willing cooperators because they are rewarded for the number of plans written and practices implemented. At the same time, everybody knows a small minority of non-participants cause most of the problems.

"We'd like to pretend this isn't happening and drive by those farms and ranches shaking your heads saying somebody ought to do something," said Nowak. "You say it's not your problem. You expect the government to take care of those situations, yet you want local control. You can't have it both ways.

"Target your leadership efforts at that small minority. It's hypocrisy to ignore those difficult people who aren't easy to work with. If you're going to truly develop leadership, you need to use common sense, make friends with non-participating producers, and gradually pull them in.

"You represent literally thousands of years of local knowledge, experience and wisdom. How much of that is contained in your annual and long-range work plans? Very little. We rely on various technical assessments and monitoring data.

"Where's the land user? Failing to include him or her is a critical mistake. Conservation is the relationship between a person and the land. You can't achieve it without involving people."

Nowak urged district supervisors to attend at least one meeting with another organization per month to forge new partnerships.

Other speakers included Dr. David Litchford, Utah Valley College, Provo, who told conference attendees that few great accomplishments are ever the work of a single individual.

"The essence of true leadership is voluntary fol-

lowers," he said. "History writes only of Michelangelo, but he worked with a group of 16 others to paint the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

To catch the vision, leaders should look outside the box and beyond the ordinary to establish a goal that can be visualized. Begin with the end in mind.

"Share that vision individually, Litchford said. "Help others see it. Then participate as a group in achieving it."

Conservation districts considered four resolutions during their meeting, with the following results:

Resolution 1 concerning a change in NRCS Idaho policy on use of EQIP funds for conversion of irrigation sprinkler systems was rejected.

Resolution 2 encouraging NACD to no longer hold or sponsor the Spring Legislative Conference beginning in 2004 was accepted.

Resolution 3 concerning increased EQIP field office allocations to address high priorities within each district was accepted.

Resolution 4 which reaffirmed the Idaho Conservation Partnership was accepted.

Kyle Hawley, Moscow, was elected new IASCD President.

## **IASCD award winners**

Recipients of awards presented by the Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts during its annual conference in Boise, Nov. 9-12.

**Legislator of the Year Award:** Darrell Bolz, Idaho House of Representatives, for his help in updating the conservation district law as outlined in House Bill 109 and carrying the bill through the legislative process.

**Elementary Conservation Teacher of the Year:** Anita Smirch, Challis Elementary School, nominated by Custer SWCD, in recognition of her innovative activities to teach an awareness and appreciation of the value of natural resources conservation.

**IASCD Poster Contest:** Megan Frickley, Rigby, first place winner, sponsored by West Side SWCD.

**IASCD Speech Contest:** Emily Poteet, Rupert, sponsored by the West Cassia SWCD.

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**Agency Employee of the Year:** Mike Hoffman, water Quality Resource Conservationist, Idaho Soil Conservation Commission, Idaho Falls, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to soil and water conservation.

**Idaho District Employees Association District Employee of the Year:** Debbie Tiede, Power SCD, American Falls, in recognition of her two decades of work in natural resource conservation and IDEA leadership.

**Idaho Grassman of the Year:** James Guthrie, Bannock County, sponsored by Portneuf SWCD, for the outstanding conservation work he has implemented on his ranch.

**Doyle L. Scott Award:** Hugh Koonce, Fairfield, for his personal commitment to conservation on his farming operation and involvement in key conservation activities with the Camas SCD, Wood River RC&D Area, and in Camas County.

**IASCD Special Recognition Award:** Sharon Norris, Boise, who retired in early Sept. as NRCS public affairs specialist, for her accomplishments in assisting conservation districts and the Idaho Conservation Partnership during her 40-year career.

## **Bradshaw recipient of 2003 R.N. Irving Award**

Lloyd Bradshaw, district conservationist, Rexburg, received the R.N. Irving Award during the IASCD annual conference. He was cited for going the "extra mile" for conservation, his low stress livestock management seminars, and the time he volunteers to serve on the Henry's Fork Watershed Council, Sheridan Creek Subcommittee, the Sage Grouse Subcommittee, and the Medicine Lodge Restoration Project.

In presenting the award, State Conservationist Rich Sims said, "He always gives 110 percent to everything he does for the NRCS and Madison and Clark Soil Conservation Districts."

Lloyd began his career with the Soil Conservation Service in 1973 as a part-time employee while attending Idaho State University. After receiving his degree in Range Management, he began work full time for SCS at Pocatello. He later

transferred to the Adam's Conservation District to work with John Dyer at the OX Ranch on a coordinated resource management plan.

In 1977 he became the District Conservationist at Weiser assisting the Weiser River SWCD. He worked on the Brundage PL 566 Watershed Project and helped ranchers on the Brownlee Ranch with a large coordinated resource management plan. He transferred to Rexburg as district conservationist in 1988, assisting the Madison and Clark SCDs. Since then, he has greatly improved the quality and quantity of service for range management activities in Division IV.

IASCD presents the annual R.N. Irving Award to recognize outstanding NRCS district conservationists in honor of R. Neil Irving, the first SCS State Conservationist in Idaho. Irving was instrumental in the passage of the State Soil Conservation District Law and organization of Idaho's soil conservation districts from December 1, 1938, through March 23, 1959.

## **Grass for Gas?**

*Loren St. John, PMC Team Leader, Aberdeen*

You've probably seen or heard the commercials for ethanol-blended fuels made from corn and how increased use of bio-fuels may someday reduce our reliance on imported oil products and reduce air pollution.

Until recently, not much research has taken place to evaluate perennial plants for biofuel feed stocks.

The Aberdeen PMC began cooperating this summer with the Agricultural Research Service Forage Seed and Cereal Research Unit in Corvallis, Oregon, to evaluate perennial native grasses for potential use as biofuel feed stocks.

Forage samples were collected from 13 accessions in the Grass Display Nursery at the PMC. The samples were air-dried and shipped to the ARS Research Unit for biochemical analysis. The study's objective is to identify the change in lignin, hemicellulose, cellulose, and sugars as a plant grows. Data analysis is not yet completed for samples collected this year.

The PMC also provided the ARS Research Unit with standard seed packets of Magnar basin wildrye, Sodar streambank wheatgrass, and Nezpar Indian ricegrass for greenhouse studies to verify the field sampling.

We plan to continue to cooperate with ARS to evaluate perennial grasses for potential use as biofuel feed stocks.



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## New tools from the plant materials toolkit

The Aberdeen PMC is cooperating with the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service to release a native flax and a bluebunch wheatgrass. These new releases will be a nice addition to the plant materials "toolkit" to help solve resource problems.

In 1980, the Forest Service Shrub Sciences Laboratory in Provo, Utah, and the Aberdeen PMC cooperatively released Appar blue flax. It is recommended as a component of a seed mixture to provide diversity and beauty. Appar was originally identified as a native species to North America but was later determined to be an introduced species from Europe.

The PMC is assisting the Shrub Sciences Lab to compare Appar to one of the more promising native accessions collected near Maple Grove, Utah. The Maple Grove Selection produces 70 to 90 percent as much seed as Appar, an important consideration for seed growers. The PMC has established a seed increase field at the PMC, and certified seed will be available to commercial seed growers in early 2004.

Goldar was the first released cultivar of bluebunch wheatgrass. It was released by the Aberdeen PMC and the ARS Forage and Range Laboratory in Logan, Utah, in 1989. Goldar has been noted for rapid establishment, high forage production and the ability to survive in areas receiving at least 12 inches of annual precipitation. Less than desirable seedling vigor has occasionally been noted.

The PMC is providing assistance to the Shrub Sciences Lab to increase seed of Anatone bluebunch wheatgrass. Anatone was selected from seed originating near Anatone, Washington. Its full range of adaptation is unknown at this time but it is expected to have rapid establishment and to survive in areas receiving at least 10 inches of annual precipitation.

The seed increase field that the PMC established last spring did exhibit excellent seedling vigor. Certified seed from the Anatone seed increase field at the PMC will also be available to commercial seed growers in early 2004.

These new plant materials products have been developed under the auspices of the Great Basin Native Plant Selection and Increase Project. This work is funded by the Bureau of Land Management Great Basin Restoration Initiative and the Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station with many other cooperating agencies, including the Aberdeen PMC.

## What's on the horizon for field conservationists?

Some exciting new programs are in the works that will take some training and adjustment but will pay off in the future with faster planning and more accountability for the practices we help farmers install.

State conservationists were introduced to these new processes and tools at a recent National Leadership Team meeting. Here is a brief synopsis.

Common Resource Areas (CRA) are subdivisions of Major Land Resources Areas (MLRA). CRA may have similarities in soils, culture, climate, or other factors.

Conservation System Guides (CSG) will be developed for each CRA. A CSG will include a basic resource setting and the typical conservation practices that are recommended for a similar site (Section III of the Field Office Technical Guide and eFOTG have similar guides. We used to call them Guidance documents).

Each conservation practice in a CSG is analyzed for the effects on the resources of concern. Those accumulated effects will become part of our agency's report to Congress on what we've accomplished, looking at the outcomes of the practice and not just "practices applied."

The National Agriculture Statistics Service is currently helping USDA and NRCS determine just what these effects are.

The National Resources Inventory Conservation Effects Assessment Project (NRI-CEAP) is helping us tie the conservation practices we help farmers put on the land to the environmental effects these practices have.

SmarTech is a software program that will help bring all of these efforts together. A conservationist will select a CSG that closely matches the situation that is being planned for a customer. SmarTech will populate the Customer Service Toolkit (CST) plan with the typical practices from the CSG. The planner can override the template plan to tailor it to the customer's operation. SmarTech looks at the practices and tallies up the effects of the practices as they are checked "installed."

Similarly, the new reporting system—Performance Results System (PRS)—will periodically go into conservation plans and the ProTracts database and "mine

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out" the data for agency reports.

ProTracts, short for the Program Contracts System, is a web-based software program used to manage NRCS conservation program applications and cost-share agreements.

Many things have to happen before these processes are completed. Customer Service Toolkit will go on the Web instead of residing on the field office server. State Office staff and others will need to prepare all of the Common Resource Areas and Conservation System Guides. Every conservationist in the field will need to receive training.

Down the road when the Farm Service Agency has the Common Land Units (tract and field boundaries) digitized, we may be able to speed up conservation planning even more.

Article by Joyce Swartzendruber  
from Ohio Current Developments

## News in brief

### Guidance documents on the web

Chief Knight has directed all states to post guidance documents by common resource area to the web by Jan. 1, 2004.

Because of the work done by field staff the past few years, Idaho had a great database of guidance documents that can be modified for this effort. They will be tied into Toolkit and PRS and will be used to show sheet and rill and wind erosion savings and water savings from our conservation activities.

Progress to date: Quality Criteria has been revised to comply with national standardized format. The planning spreadsheet has been updated to reflect current resource concerns and conservation practices.

The most note-worthy activity took place the week of Nov. 3 when field, area and state staffs worked together to identify and develop more than 60 guidance documents that will be posted to the web.

### Pheasants Forever awarded TSP contract

We awarded Pheasants Forever a Technical Service Provider contract in early Oct. Under the contract, Pheasants Forever will help interested landowners apply for programs, formulate conservation plans, ensure the use of proper conservation practices to meet standards, promote conservation programs, and help generate landowner interest.

"This contract is a great example of how the

Technical Service Provider program should work," said State Conservationist Rich Sims. "In Pheasants Forever, we've made what we consider to be the perfect match. They have proven expertise in the planning and design of plans and conservation practices that will benefit wildlife, which is one of the primary goals of the Conservation Reserve Program."

### Wildfire rehab publication

If you need a fact sheet to teach people about hydrophobic soils, you're in luck. The Soil Quality Institute recently printed 10,000 copies of the fact sheet "Hydrophobicity." Hydrophobic soils are a common problem following severe wildfires. The fact sheet describes the problem and offers treatment suggestions.

Quantities can be ordered from the NRCS Landcare Office by phone (toll free) at 1-888-LANDCARE or by email to [landcare@swcs.org](mailto:landcare@swcs.org). Copies can be downloaded from [http://soils.usda.gov/sqi/soil quality/what is/sqiinfo.html](http://soils.usda.gov/sqi/soil%20quality/what%20is/sqiinfo.html).

### Adopt a SNOTEL site materials will be updated

The Snow Survey Staff has signed a contract with the Idaho Environmental Education Association to revise and update the Adopt a SNOTEL Program that was originally issued in 1989. Over the years, the Snow Survey Staff has received inquiries as to when the old three-ring binder would be updated with information now available on the Internet rather than having student access data from the old Unix CFS computer in Portland.

Current plans are to update the teacher's manual for Idaho and conduct a pilot test to introduce the curriculum to teachers. Once the templates are created, it may be expanded and promoted West-wide. Timeline for completion is June 2005.

### Draft EIS out for review

The draft environmental impact statement for the Little Wood River Irrigation District gravity pressurized delivery system, Blaine County, has been completed and is now going through a review and comment period.

The purpose of the proposed project action is to maximize the conservation and use of irrigation water and energy required to irrigate all existing cropland within the project area, according to Maureen Meagher, project coordinator, Shoshone.

The public review period ends Dec. 7, 2003. The

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EIS can be viewed on our Idaho Home Page at [www.id.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.id.nrcs.usda.gov).

### **State Equipment Committee will meet soon**

The State Equipment Committee will meet Dec. 8 at the State Office to discuss equipment needs from around the state, priorities, purchases, and budget. Field employees who have equipment needs need to inform their area conservationists, through channels, before that date to have their requests considered.

### **How effective was Farm Bill media outreach?**

A survey designed and conducted by the NRCS Farm Bill Liaison Team at the national level sought to assess the effectiveness of our Farm Bill media outreach tactics during the past year and determine how publishers, editors and writers view NRCS information products and information professionals.

#### **The results:**

- Only farmers and ranchers rank higher than NRCS as sources most often consulted regarding conservation stories. This underscores the opportunity for NRCS to use farmer/rancher success stories to demonstrate the success of conservation programs and activities.
- NRCS Farm Bill news releases got high marks regarding timing and news value.
- NRCS news releases and web sites are the two leading sources of Farm Bill information, outpacing other venues by a significant margin.

## **Who's in charge of fighting noxious weeds?**

As the scope and awareness of Idaho's noxious weed problem moves ever higher on the public radar screen, county weed superintendents are being deluged with calls from concerned citizens wanting weeds controlled on their property.

"Many people believe weeds are the responsibility of the county as part of the service for which they pay taxes," said Roger Batt, coordinator of the Idaho

Weed Awareness Campaign. "But Idaho's noxious weed law actually requires they be controlled both on public and private land by the individual, company or agency that owns the land."

Idaho weed experts estimate that noxious weeds will cause \$300 million in direct damages to the state's economy and lands this year. Another \$12 million is lost each year in the productivity of Idaho crops directly affected by noxious weeds. Idaho weed-control specialists annually spend about \$15 million to battle the 36 varieties of noxious weeds that have gained foothold in the state.

Citizens can help out in the battle by calling the weed experts only for technical information about how to treat noxious weeds on their land.

For more information on noxious weeds or for information on how to contact local county weed superintendents for technical expertise, log on to the Campaign's noxious weed web site at: [www.idahoweedawareness.org](http://www.idahoweedawareness.org).

*Editor's note: This article would be appropriate for use in conservation district and other local newsletters.*

### **Safety and Health**

## **Shoveling Safely**

*by Bill Patterson, State Safety Officer*

Why do hospital emergency room admissions skyrocket after a major snow storm? Because people put their hearts under a lot of stress while shoveling snow.

To shovel more safely this winter, keep this advice in mind:

**Dress in layers.** Most people throw on a heavy coat, then quickly overheat once they've been at it a few minutes. This puts your heart under greater strain. This winter, wear a shirt under a sweater under a light jacket and strip off layers as you warm up.

**Drink water.** Most people shovel in the morning when they're dehydrated, which also stresses the heart. So drink a couple of large glasses of water 30 minutes before you start shoveling snow.

**Take it slow.** Take a break every 5 to 10 minutes while you're working. And never let your heart rate exceed 85 percent of its maximum. What's your maximum? Subtract your age from 220. So, if you're

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50, it's 170 beats per minute. Eighty-five percent of that is about 144 beats per minute. Take your pulse for 10 seconds and multiply by 6 to get your beats per minute.

**Don't ignore chest pain or tightness.** If this kind of ache strikes, assume the worse and call an ambulance or have someone drive you to the emergency room.

*Source: Better Homes & Gardens, Dec. 2003*

## **Join ARSCSE to stay connected with SCS/NRCS family**

The Association of Retired Soil Conservation Service Employees (ARSCSE) has introduced a one-year complementary membership for new retirees and those who leave NRCS prior to retirement (retroactive to 1/1/2003).

Current NRCS employees may also join the organization as affiliate members for \$12 per year. It's a great way to keep in touch with former coworkers and friends.

Contact State Representative Stan Hobson, 4951 W. Baywood St., Boise 83703 for a membership application.

"If ours is a government by the people and for the people, as Lincoln said and I believe, then the highest priority has to be placed on public information."

*--Walter Mondale, former Vice President*

## **Personnel actions**

### **Excepted appointment**

**Sherry Trotter** to GS-5 Soil Conservationist, Meridian, effective 09/21/03.

### **Promotions**

**Mark Cottrell** to GS-11 District Conservationist, Plummer, effective 08/10/03.

**Patrick Evans** to GS-11 District Conservationist, Rupert, effective 07/27/03.

**Martha Nunez-Hagius**, GS-9 Civil Engineer, American Falls, effective 08/24/03.

**Bruce Sandoval** to GS-12 Irrigation Engineer, Twin Falls, effective 10/05/03.

**Kari Short** to GS-7 Soil Conservationist, St. Anthony, effective 09/21/03.

### **Reassignment**

**Ron Davidson** to Hawaii State Office as GS-13 Natural Resources Manager/Program Planning Staff, effective 10/19/03.

**Robert Kinney** to Marsing as a GS-7 Soil Conservationist, effective 08/24/03.

**Terril Stevenson**, Boise SO, as a GS-12 Natural Resources Specialist, effective 10/19/03.

### **Resignation**

**Lynn Rasmussen**, GS-12 District Conservationist, Lewiston, effective 07/11/03.

**Jared Reed**, GS-2 Biological Science Aid, Aberdeen PMC, effective 07/31/03.

### **Transfer**

**Chris Catherman** from BLM to GS-11 Grants and Agreements Specialist, Boise SO, effective 09/21/03.



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## Retirement

**Robert McConnaughey**, GS-7 Soil Conservation Technician, Soda Springs, effective 10/15/03 (disability).

**Sharon Norris**, GS-12 Public Affairs Specialist, Boise SO, effective 09/02/03.

"In politics I am a conservative, in agriculture a conservationist. To be so, I do not have to wear two hats. The two just naturally go together. The conservationist seeks to preserve, develop and improve the natural resources of soil, water, minerals, and timber that made and that keep this county materially rich. The conservative seeks to preserve, develop, and improve the political resources that made and keep this country free. To me, the political resources of this land are no less important than its natural resources. As a conservative and a conservationist, I want to preserve both, develop both, improve both."

--Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson

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